DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 729 TM 023 159

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TITLE Design of a Quality Schools Survey Instrument through the Use of a Four-Cycle Action Research Process.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Action Research; Administrator Attitudes; College Faculty; Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Principals; *Research Methodology; Surveys; *Test Construction; *Validity
IDENTIFIERS Experts; *Quality Schools Consortium

ABSTRACT

The Quality Schools Consortium is composed of approximately 140 elementary, middle, and high schools in North America. An action research project was conducted to develop and refine a survey instrument to determine the perceptions of principals in the Quality Schools consortium with regard to the interpretation and implementation of the Quality Schools policies and practices. The project began with a draft of the survey instrument based on a review of the literature. The development process moved through four complete cycles using a panel of 4 experts from higher education, 10 representatives of the target population of principals, and a faculty member from the Institute for Control Theory, Reality Therapy and Quality Management in Los Angeles (California). A consortium conference was also used to gather data for refining the instrument. Various members of the expert panel were included in the collaborative process during different cycles of the action research. The result was a significantly redesigned survey instrument whose validity was recognized by every member of the expert panel. An appendix contains the survey instrument. (Contains 6 references.) (SLD)

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Design of a Quality Schools survey instrument through the use of a four-cycle action research process

by

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A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, San Francisco, April 18-22, 1995

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INTRODUCTION

This action research project contributed to the researcher's understanding of the interpretation and implementation of Quality Schools ideas (Glasser, 1990) in K-12 schools The project was used to develop the survey instrument for research designed to answer the question: How is quality education defined, measured, implemented and sustained by schools in the Quality Schools consortium? This question was answered using the perceptions of consortium principals.

The Quality Schools consortium is composed of approximately 140 elementary, middle, and high schools in North America. These schools are committed to translating and implementing the Quality Schools ideas into their school community. The consortium was formed in 1991 and is organized through The Institute for Control Theory, Reality Therapy and Quality Management in Los Angeles.

The process employed to develop the instrument used to survey the consortium principals constitutes action research in that the researcher is involved in:

> a systematic collaborative process whereby the practitioner voluntarily engages in a spiral of reflection, documentation, and action in order to understand more fully the nature and/or consequences of aspects of their practice with a view to shaping further action or changing their situation (Davis, 1985).

This process and the impact on instrument development is the focus of the remainder of this paper.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

During the action research project, the researcher collaborated with a panel of experts in the field. Members of this panel were a part of the reflection, documentation and action used in developing the survey instrument. Four university professors, a senior faculty member at the Institute For Control Theory, Reality Therapy and Quality Management and ten principals from the research population served as the panel of experts during different cycles of the process. The ten consortium principals were chosen through nomination by the administrator of the Institute for Control Theory, Reality Therapy and Quality Management. A consortium meeting was also used as an opportunity to gather data during the second cycle of the process.

A four-cycle action research process was used with the expert panel and a new draft of the survey instrument was the result of each cycle. Dialogue with members of the expert panel occurred through telephone, mail, face-to-face meetings, and on-site visits with principals at two consortium schools. The two consortium schools used for on-site visits with principals were chosen based on proximity to the researcher.

Members of the expert panel were asked to analyze the survey in relation to clarity, ease of administration, and the fit between the research questions and the survey instrument. Members' recommendations led to revisions of the instrument and a further analysis by the panel. As a result of the development process, the final draft of the instrument was approved by every expert on the

panel. Every member of the panel confirmed the content validity of the final version of the survey instrument.

PROCESS: CYCLES

Draft 1

Having decided that the perceptions of principals would be canvassed through the use of survey research methodology, the first draft of an instrument was developed. Key constructs and practices were taken from The Quality School (Glasser, 1990) and Supplementary Material For Readers of the Quality School (Glasser, 1991).

The design of the survey was also guided by sound principles of survey research methodology as outlined by Fink and Kosecoff (1985) and Fowler (1993). The survey was designed to answer one broad research question (How is quality education defined, measured, implemented and sustained by schools in the Quality Schools consortium?) and sixteen more specific research questions as subsets of the broader question.

Data Gathering

In the first cycle, the collaborative process involved two faculty members at the University of the Pacific. Copies of the first draft

were analyzed by the faculty members and feedback was provided to the researcher in writing and through follow-up interviews.

Reflection

The main issue raised during this cycle by one of the faculty members was the exclusive use of principal's perceptions in answering the research questions. Concern was expressed that the findings would be subject to criticism by those who questioned the validity of principals' perceptions without corroborating evidence through triangulation. After considering possible modifications, consensus was reached on not modifying the survey instrument to address this concern. Instead, a decision was made to include a check of principals' perceptions through development of a companion survey for delivery to parent representatives at consortium schools.

Debate also arose about acknowledgment within the survey instrument as to the source of ideas canvassed. Concern for acknowledgment of the source was countered by a concern that the inclusion of the source could potentially influence the respondents to "take their answers from that source." The source remained excluded in Draft 2.

The result of Cycle 1 was additional insight into the theoretical constructs of Quality Schools through reading, discussing and designing. The tangible outcome was Draft 2 of the survey instrument.

Draft 2

Although the original intent was to revise the instrument exclusively through collaboration with members of the expert panel, it became evident to the researcher that other methods of gathering data would add to the validity of the instrument as well as provide additional insight into the translation of Quality Schools ideas into consortium schools. A meeting of consortium schools in Los Angeles (October, 1993) provided the researcher with another opportunity for gathering data and adding insight.

Data Gathering

The Quality Schools Consortium Meeting was held in Los Angeles between October 15th and 17th, 1993. Representatives from about 50 of the consortium schools attended. These representatives included principals, superintendents and teachers. Formal input was provided by William Glasser. The majority of conference time was used by members to formulate a mission statement and interim management structure for the consortium.

Data was gathered through attending lectures and discussions, recording field notes and initiating individual discussions with the school representatives.

Reflection

During Cycle 2 several insights about the consortium impacted on survey instrumentation. The most notable of these were:

1. Participants discussed at length how quality education is measured. School participants indicated that a variety of measures were used within their communities to indicate movement towards a Quality School position. Multiple indicators were discussed as a more valid measure than a single measure such as standardized test scores. Portfolios and performance assessment were mentioned by participants as having an increasing priority in their schools. As a result of this information, more indicators of quality were added to the survey instrument.

2. Since the target population was principals in consortium schools and the consortium spanned K-12, it was decided after discussion and conference input to realign the survey to better address common practices in all K-12 schools. Practices that could be seen to be the exclusive province of elementary or secondary schools were removed from the survey.

3. A significant number of practices and issues beyond those mentioned in the Quality Schools literature were discussed at the conference. As such, the instrument was refined to incorporate the opportunity for respondents to add practices and indicators not listed as choices on the survey. In addition, a final open-ended question was added to the survey to allow for any additional information administrators saw as important.

4. The level of commitment discussed at the conference among the consortium members gave rise to a concern about level of

response to the survey. Length of survey as a contributing factor to response rate was considered in each draft of the survey. The desire on behalf of the researcher and members of the expert panel to include 'everything' was continually weighed up against the potential for discouraging responses by principals. As a result, containing the length remained a priority factor during any reworking of the survey.

Draft 3

Draft 3 was the result of the actions and reflections in Cycle 2. During Cycle 2 contacts were made with administrators at elementary, middle school and high school level for use as field experts in Cycle 3. Nominations of 'expert administrators' were also sought from the administrator at the Institute for Control Theory, Reality Therapy and Quality Management. A field expert was also added from the senior faculty at the Institute. Consultation with two of the field experts was through on-site interviews. The remaining field experts were consulted with through phone, fax and mail.

Data Gathering

Copies of Draft 3 were sent to eight nominated field experts across the range of K-12 education along with a senior faculty member at the Institute for Control Theory, Reality Therapy and Quality Management. Prior to sending Draft 3, each nominated field expert was contacted by phone unless their possible involvement had

already been discussed at the conference. The draft instrument was accompanied by a letter affirming their involvement and a letter from Glasser supporting the research. To encourage their participation in the development of the instrument, a self-addressed, stamped envelope was included.

Two principals at consortium schools in northern California were also contacted for on-site interviews. Prior to the on-site interviews, both principals were sent a copy of Draft 3 and a letter confirming the arrangements. One participant was principal at the K-6 level and the other principal was at the 7-12 level. A proforma was developed prior to the on-site interviews. Interviews were recorded on tape for later analysis. Feedback from all participants in this cycle was summarized and entered on a Draft 3 survey.

Reflection

A significant number of changes were made to Draft 3 as a result of data gathered through the collaborative process with field experts during this cycle. The most notable of these changes were:

1. Numerous comments were received on language used in the survey. Assumptions made by the researcher about common interpretation of words and phrases did not always prove to be accurate. Feedback was received from several field experts on the use of language in the survey and several modifications were made based on that feedback.

2. One specific example of language usage in the survey was raised by the faculty member from the Institute for Control Theory, Reality Therapy and Quality Management. Questions that

were previously worded to include ". . . teach . . . " were changed to read ". . . study and discuss. . . . ." It was the strong contention of the faculty member that such changes were more than semantic differences. They argued that no one can teach concepts to students. All any teacher can do is to "present information, discuss, study and explain" such concepts. Consistent with control theory principles, students must "teach themselves."

3. The number of questions directly related to exploring the place of self-evaluation (student and teacher) as measures of quality in consortium schools was increased. This was in line with feedback highlighting its priority in the Quality School literature.

4. Both on-site interviews led to discussion about survey questions designed to explore the definition of quality education. One principal argued that respondents should be asked to define 'Quality Schools' rather than 'quality education.' The second principal took the opposite stand. Both agreed that they saw these as two separate but overlapping constructs. After further reflection and discussion with members of the expert panel, and consideration given to arguments put forward by Glasser (1992) for redefining 'quality education', it was decided to view 'quality education' as a vision needing further definition and a 'Quality School' as the structure to deliver it.

5. Questions designed to canvass how quality education is measured were significantly retooled as a result of feedback and reflection from on-site experts. The rationale was two fold. In previous drafts of the instrument, respondents were asked to rate 32 measurement indicators. The on-site experts saw providing data on 32

measurement indicators as arduous. Such a perception could lead to a higher level of non-response. The researcher also concluded, in consultation with field experts, that Draft 3 canvassed 'what measurement is used in consortium schools' but not necessarily 'what measurement is or should be used in a Quality School'. The redraft was thus designed to canvass both: (a) what current measurement practices are employed in consortium schools and (b) what principals predict measurement practices will be in Quality Schools. Rather than rate each of 32 indicators, respondents were asked to nominate the five most frequently used in each of the two categories.

6. Although impact on students could be inferred from responses to several questions in Draft 3, the researcher decided to include questions designed to directly gather data about this issue. As was suggested by one on-site expert, "no matter how good it is or what principals think of it, the initiative is worth next to nothing if it doesn't make a significant and positive impact on the students."

Final Instrument

Draft 4 was the result of actions and reflections in Cycle 3. Having further clarified Quality Schools ideas and received feedback on Draft 3 of the survey instrument through written comments from field experts and discussion with consortium participants on-site, Cycle 4 involved a final revision of the instrument in consultation with faculty at the University of the Pacific. Before professional

production of the survey instrument, the final copy was sent to all members of the expert panel for approval.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this action research project was to develop and refine a survey instrument to canvass the perceptions of principals in the Quality Schools consortium on the interpretation and implementation of the Quality Schools policies and practices.

The project began with a draft of the survey instrument based on Quality Schools ideas and practices contained in the literature. The development process moved through four complete cycles using a panel of experts from higher education, the target population, and the Institute for Control Theory, Reality Therapy and Quality Management. A consortium conference was also used to gather data for refining the instrument. Various members of the expert panel were included in the collaborative process during different cycles of the action research project. The result was a significantly redesigned survey instrument seen to have validity by every member of the expert panel consulted during the design process. A copy of the final survey instrument is attached as an appendix to this paper. A professionally produced copy of the instrument is available from the author upon request.

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APPENDIX

Dryden Quality Schools Survey Instrument

DRYDEN QUALITY SCHOOLS SURVEY

Thanks for providing this information. When you have completed this survey, please return it to:

John Dryden, School of Education
Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology
University of the Pacific, Stockton, CA 95211

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Please check the categories that best describe your school and school district.

Type: Elementary_____ Middle_____ High School_____ K-8_____ K-12_____

Alternative_____ Public_____ Private_____ Religious_____ Secular_____

Location: Urban_____ Suburban_____ Rural_____

Student Population of the School: Less than 100_____ 100-250_____ 251-500_____ 501-1000_____ 1001-1500_____ Over 1500_____

School District Population: Less than 1000_____ 1001-2500_____ 2501-10,000_____ 10,001-25,000_____ 25,001-100,000_____ Over 100,000_____

2. Please estimate the % of each of the following subgroups in your student population.

High SES* _____ Middle SES _____ Low SES _____

Asian-American _____ Native-American _____ Hispanic-American _____

African-American _____ Caucasian _____

*NB: SES= socioeconomic status

3. Please indicate your school's phase of Quality Schools training and % of staff involved in that training.

Phase of Quality Schools Training (Please check the highest level reached)

Phase 1 (Reading and discussing 'The Quality School')_____

Phase 2a (Completed Basic Week)_____ Phase 2b (Completed Advanced Week)_____

Phase 3 (Teaching Control Theory to students)_____ Phase 4 (Integration)_____

% of Staff (Administrative and Teaching) Involved in Quality Schools Training_____

4. How long has the present principal been at this site?

Less than 1 yr._____ 1-2 yrs._____ 2-5 yrs._____ More than 5 yrs._____

SECTION B: QUALITY SCHOOLS PRACTICES

1. Listed below are the major characteristics of a Quality School as outlined by William Glasser. Please circle the number that most closely corresponds to the degree these practices are evident in your school.

(Response scale for Section B)

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Regularly	Always

Management

1.	Administrators operate noncoercively with everyone in the school community	0 1 2 3 4
2.	Teachers operate noncoercively with students	0 1 2 3 4
3.	Administrators, teachers, students and parents meet regularly to discuss management of the school	0 1 2 3 4
4.	Problem solving strategies are used at all levels	0 1 2 3 4
5.	An ongoing professional dialogue is engaged in between teachers and administrators	0 1 2 3 4
6.	An ongoing professional dialogue is engaged in between teachers and students	0 1 2 3 4

Measurement

7.	Students are asked to evaluate their work for quality	0 1 2 3 4
8.	Teachers teach the skills of self-evaluation to students	0 1 2 3 4
9.	Self-evaluation is used as part of the assessment process	0 1 2 3 4
10.	Tests are open book	0 1 2 3 4
11.	Students are not required to memorize facts for tests	0 1 2 3 4
12.	Tests ask students to explain how the information can be used in peoples' lives	0 1 2 3 4
13.	Objective tests (such as multiple choice) are not used	0 1 2 3 4
14.	Assessment include demonstrations of competence whenever possible	0 1 2 3 4
15.	Any grade can be improved	0 1 2 3 4

Definition and delivery of quality schoolwork

16.	Students are involved in defining quality	0 1 2 3 4
17.	Useful and relevant material is taught	0 1 2 3 4
18.	Teachers explain the usefulness of material to students	0 1 2 3 4
19.	Skills of speaking, reading, writing and problem solving are emphasized	0 1 2 3 4
20.	Any homework given is not graded	0 1 2 3 4
21.	Students assign homework to themselves to learn more, to prepare for tests and to improve their grades	0 1 2 3 4
22.	Students are trained to serve as tutors for students who need additional instructional help	0 1 2 3 4
23.	Adult volunteers are involved with teaching in classrooms	0 1 2 3 4
24.	School programs for students to help in the community are included in the curriculum	0 1 2 3 4
25.	Cooperative learning is used in classrooms	0 1 2 3 4

Control theory and reality therapy

26.	Teachers formally study and discuss control theory	0 1 2 3 4
27.	Students formally study and discuss control theory	0 1 2 3 4
28.	Students trained in reality therapy are available as peer counselors	0 1 2 3 4
29.	Other_____	0 1 2 3 4
30.	Other_____	0 1 2 3 4

2. Look again at the above practices. Consider the items that you have marked with a 3 or 4. Which five practices have had the greatest positive impact on your movement towards becoming a Quality School? Write the item numbers in the spaces below.

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____

3. Taking all of the characteristics in Section B into account, how close would you rate your school to being a Quality School ? (Please circle a number on the continuum)

0 1 2 3 4 5

Not a Quality School Quality School

SECTION C: IMPACT AND MEASUREMENT

1. What has been the impact on students of your school's involvement in the Quality Schools initiative?

2. Listed below are indicators often used to measure the level of quality education in schools.

School goals/objectives (1)
Promotion statistics (2)
Extracurricular activities (3)
Program evaluation reports (4)
Crime/Vandalism rates (5)
Curriculum content (6)
College placement (7)
Portfolio analysis (8)
Gains in special education (9)
Job placement (10)
Parent/community surveys (11)
State mandated test results (12)
Inservice programs (13)
Student surveys (14)
Student grades (15)
Performance/Demonstration (16)
Principal's role in school (17)
School environment (18)
Student self evaluation (19)
Teacher attendance (20)
Teacher attitudes (21)
Suspensions/expulsions (22)
ACT/SAT results (23)
Vocational choices (24)
Competencies (25)
Teacher self evaluation (26)
Student attendance (27)
Student attitude information (28)
Curriculum implementation (29)
Computer literacy (30)
Follow-up after high school (31)
Drop out rates (32)

Choose five from the above list that are currently the key indicators used by your school to measure the level of quality. Write the item numbers below. If one or two of your key indicators are not included in the above list, please write them in the 'Other' spaces.

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Other_____ _____

When you reach your goal of being a Quality School, would you predict that your key indicators will be the same_____ or different_____? If 'different', what do you predict your list of key indicators will be?

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Other_____ _____

SECTION D: DEFINITION AND PROCESS

1. How do you define 'quality education'?

2. Is this a _____personal or _____school community definition? (Please check)

   If 'school community', please briefly describe the process used to arrive at this definition.

3. Please list constraints that have significantly impeded your progress towards becoming a Quality School.

4. Please list facilitating factors that have supported your movement towards becoming a Quality School.

5. In your role as principal, what are you finding to be your key management practices in implementing and sustaining quality education in your school?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please use the back of this sheet to add other information that describes the progress of your school towards becoming a Quality School.

Please return the completed survey to: John Dryden, School of Education
Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology
University of the Pacific, Stockton, CA 95211

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP

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